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DCI Worldwide Briefing  
Whither Qadhafi

Popular acceptance of Qadhafi and his revolutionary regime has eroded dangerously over the past several years; dissatisfaction is no longer confined to the middle and upper classes--the main targets of revolutionary reform--but has spread within the lower classes as well. The main reasons are:

- repression in form of corruption trials, regular purges, and increasingly powerful "vigilante" revolutionary committees;
- political and social programs that offend Islamic values and the generally conservative nature of Libyan people, i.e., conscription of females;
- eradication of private enterprise, confiscation of property and savings, and poor economic planning causing regular dislocations in daily lives of all Libyans.

Qadhafi's distrust and high-handed treatment of military has amplified discontent there, particularly in officers corps. Coup plotting and assassination attempts have stepped up since mid-1970s with about two or three attempts on the average every year.

- Our knowledge of these efforts is fragmentary, but we can confirm that most efforts to oust Qadhafi come from disaffected military officers. (Most serious in December 1981 when Qadhafi shot in shoulder.)

- [redacted] network of Qadhafi loyalists very effective in aborting attempts to unseat the regime. Nonetheless, Qadhafi and company have been increasingly forced into siege mentality.

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Libyan exiles in Middle East and Europe have organized into active but still largely ineffectual opposition. Most exiles come from discredited class that flourished under monarchy; few have any significant following in Libya or any strong talent for assembling a serious challenge to the regime. Their propaganda efforts have badly unnerved Qadhafi, however, and he publicly threatened in October to revive his notorious campaign of assassination against them, demanding they recant past sins and return to Libya. We believe some Libyan hit squads already deployed to Europe awaiting orders to key exile leaders.

Serious trouble-making from Libya is partially blunted by its inability to project real power much beyond its own border.

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This leaves Chad, Sudan, and Tunisia vulnerable, and all to varying degrees are targets of Libyan subversion. The most persistent danger posed by Qadhafi is his use of terrorism, and his well-established connections and support of accomplished terrorist operatives, particularly in the Palestinian movement. Recent disturbing developments include:

- Reports that Libya and Iran may be collaborating in efforts to undermine governments in the Persian Gulf;
- and, Qadhafi's alleged intentions to try to assassinate moderate Arab leaders in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere.

Moreover, a succession of recent failures and problems could make him more willing to lash out.

- The soft oil market and US sanctions have caused temporary dislocations in the Libyan economy for which Qadhafi blames the US and Saudi Arabia.
- Qadhafi failed to gain the chairmanship of the Organization of African Unity, due to his own inflexibility, and he blames OAU moderates and Morocco for denying him this prestigious credential. (The prospect of gaining the chairmanship had encouraged Qadhafi to curtail his disruptive influence in Africa.)
- Domestic disaffection, the propaganda of Libyan exile groups, and what Qadhafi perceives to be provocative actions by the US have convinced him that he is the target of a broad conspiracy spearheaded by the US.

Despite the seemingly tenuous position Qadhafi is in both at home and in the international community, a number of factors weigh in favor of his continuing in power.

- general economic prosperity among Libyans and their traditionally passive attitude toward rulers.
- a competent security network and extensive precautions for Qadhafi's personal safety.
- Qadhafi's fairly acute judgment as to when he has pushed the Libyan public and key interest groups too far and needs to back away from radical policies.

In sum, although a successful assassination attempt would not come as a surprise to us, Qadhafi may continue in power for some time.

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